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Matar in Pisidia: Phrygian Influences in Southwestern Anatolia

Peter Talloen / Jeroen Poblome / Marc Waelkens / Hannelore Vanhaverbeke, Leuven[1]

After the collapse of the Hittite empire, the first new power to emerge in Western Anatolia was the kingdom of the Phrygians. According to Greek tradition, the Phrygians originated from Macedonia and Thrace (Herodotos, Historiae III, 73), while their archaeological origins form part of a late second millennium BCE tradition in southeastern Europe and northwestern Anatolia. On the basis of the distribution of Phrygian inscriptions and the typical gravemounds or *tumuli* their realm is held to have stretched over the region between Eskişehir and Afyon, the core-land of the Phrygian inscriptions, and as far east as the former Hittite capital of Hattuša.

The results of archaeological excavations near Elmalı and the surveys in the area of Sagalassos and Panemoteichos, which revealed characteristic elements of the Phrygian culture such as *megara*, rock-cut chamber tombs and stepped rock-cut shafts, as well as *tumuli* with typical grave goods, have led some scholars (Mellink 1990, 140; Özgen / Özgen 1992, 33) to suggest that their rule, or at least their cultural influence, extended as far south as southwestern Pisidia and northern Lycia, an area known as the Milyas (***fig. 1***). The aim of this paper is to evaluate in what ways one can interpret the suggested framework of cultural and / or political influence in Pisidia.

1. The "Phrygian" sites in Pisidia

So far three sites in the region have yielded typical Phrygian elements. The site of Yarımada near Düver is located on top of a promontory overlooking the salt lake of Yarışlı (***fig. 2***). On this hill, traces of several buildings were registered, some of which were identified as *megara* with rich architectural terracotta decoration. Unfortunately, the latter were exposed in the 1960s during illegal

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[1] Peter Talloen is a postdoctoral fellow of the Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders (Belgium). Jeroen Poblome and Marc Waelkens are professors of Archaeology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. This text presents research results of the Interuniversitary Attraction Poles Programme – Belgian Science Policy, of the Conserted Action of the Flemish Government (GOA02/02) and of the Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders (Belgium) (FWO G.0245.02 and G.0152.04).

diggings. The *megara* were rectangular buildings with an axial entrance on the short side, of which the gable was decorated with a characteristic type of voluted *akroteria* with upturned roundels, known from some of the *megara* at Gordion and from some of the rock-cut façades in the Phrygian Highlands (Haspels 1971, figs. 513ff., 526f.). The decorated terracotta revetments retrieved at Düver represented various styles, depicting horsemen and griffins, as well as geometric designs, and were dated between the 8th and 6th centuries BCE (Greifenhagen 1966, 45f.). The number of different simas indicated that there were at least three, and possibly even six different buildings, or as many alterations to a single one (Cummer 1970, 38). Geometric patterns such as maeanders, hooks and diamonds, formed the basic repertoire of the Düver architectural terracottas. These geometric designs were considered native to Iron Age Phrygia (Cummer 1970, 42f.; Haspels 1971, 102f.). Similar geometric designs featured on the rock-cut chamber tomb on the east side of the promontory (***fig. 3***). As the exterior decoration displayed resembling characteristics to the monumental façades carved on Phrygian rock outcrops, the decoration pattern and the tomb-type were equally ascribed to the Phrygian cultural influence (Waelkens et al. 2000, 176-187).

A different category of rock-cut monuments was recorded at another Early Iron Age site, Panemoteichos, in southern Pisidia. No *megara* or rock-cut tombs were registered there so far, but a rock-cut stepped tunnel is held by the investigating scholars to display Phrygian influences (Aydal et al. 1997, 153).

A last site to reveal clear Phrygian affinities is located at Bayındır in the Elmalı plain, straddling the border of southern Pisidia and northern Lycia. Near the village of Bayındır, a total of over 100 *tumulus* burials was located. A group of five grave mounds was investigated by a team from the Antalya Museum in the late 1980s (Özgen / Özgen 1992, 32-49; Özgen / Öztürk 1996, 27). The excavations were concentrated on two of the burial mounds in particular, *Tumulus* C and *Tumulus* D, which displayed different burial customs, cremation and inhumation respectively. The general nature of these *tumuli* is similar to what is known about Phrygian burial customs. The Bayındır burials were arranged in pits, sunk into the hardpan, and the chambers were constructed of timber. The wooden chambers were packed around and above with rubble stones. Both *tumuli* also yielded grave goods of unmistakable Phrygian character. That at least two of the vessels found there were imports, or donated by resident Phrygians, is borne out by their Phrygian graffiti. The deceased who was laid to rest in *Tumulus* D was identified as a woman. She was buried probably wearing at least one of the two silver belts which both displayed delicately incised geometric decoration and were found in the same part of the chamber. On her chest lay ten bronze *fibulae*, while nine silver *fibulae* were found near her head. Other tomb deposits included small cauldrons made of silver and bronze. Also found were silver and bronze ladles, as well as silver and bronze *omphalos* bowls. There were also several silver decorative plaques, and iron horse-bits. Comparative evidence for the contents as a whole suggests a 7th century BCE date for both burials. The unmistakable Phrygian affinities of these

tombs and their grave goods, with numerous parallels from Gordion, seemingly indicate a marked Phrygian influence as far south as the Elmalı plain during this century (Özgen / Özgen 1992, 32f.).

On the basis of the evidence presented here, cultural and even political Phrygian dominance over Pisidia during the Early Iron Age has been suggested. However, let us now take a closer look at the religious / ideological evidence in order to determine whether such patterns of interpretation actually hold true.

2. The religious aspect of the Phrygian influence: the cult of Matar

Following the model of cultural dominance, one should expect the Phrygian influence to have had a religious component as well. This aspect appears to be demonstrated by the tomb deposits of *tumulus* D at Bayındır. Among the small finds of the burial mound were four figurines, one of silver and three of ivory. One of the latter was interpreted as a representation of the Phrygian Mother (***fig. 4***). The iconography of the figure shown wearing a long gown, belted at the waist, with long sleeves and a *polos* or high crown with a long veil tucked into the belt, is generally thought to indicate Matar, as her pose and costume are extremely similar to images of the goddess on Phrygian reliefs (Roller 1999, 104; Vassileva 2001, 60). The silver belts found in the same tomb marked the ritual status of the deceased, which according to Maya Vassileva may be directly related to her role in the cult of the Mother, for which she conjectures the possibility of a priestess (Vassileva 2001, 60). Also the silver statuette, identified as the image of a priest by several scholars (Özgen / Özgen 1992, 38; Özgen / Öztürk 1996, 27; Roller 1999, 105), seems to confirm a link with the cult of the Phrygian Mother.

These are the only Iron Age sources for the cult of the Mother Goddess in the region registered so far. That being said, there are numerous attestations of her cult during the classical periods, which, as we have demonstrated on a former occasion, can be used to illustrate pre-Hellenistic religious life (Talloen / Vanhaverbeke / Waelkens 2004). Several of these cults bear clear Phrygian characteristics.

Firstly, Angdeissis, the personal name of the goddess which people in Phrygia used for her as opposed to the cult title of Matar (Roller 1999, 180 n° 149; 195) is attested at two locations in Pisidia, namely at Bağsaray in the territory of Sagalassos (Bean 1954, 478-481; Robert 1980, 238f.), and at Anabura (Vermaseren 1987, 231 n° 767). Also in other places her Phrygian origin is still recollected in later times as illustrated by the Latin legend on the coins of the Roman colony of Kremna, reading "Dea Mida" (von Aulock 1979, n° 1112-1117, 1124-1129).

Furthermore, the cult of Meter Oreia, the "Mountain Mother", a literal Greek translation of the Phrygian Matar Kubileya (Brixhe 1979, 45; Roller 1999, 68), was prominent in the area, attested at Karain near Termessos (Şahin 1991, 126-132), Kocain near Sia (Moretti 1923-24) and Zindan near Tymbriada

(Vermaseren 1987, 230 n° 764) where the goddess was worshipped in caves. As the Mother of the mountains she was presumed to make an epiphany from the mountain (Roller 1999, 113) and the Pisidian cave sanctuaries exemplify this. Moreover, the arrangement of these cave sanctuaries with rock-cut niches often preceded by steps, is very reminiscent of the stepped niches and rock altars found at Phrygian shrines (Haspels 1971, 73-76, 87ff.).

It therefore seems obvious to attribute the origin of these cults to the Early Iron Age, when Phrygian influence was considered omnipresent. Moreover, as the goddess was part of the power structure of the Phrygian state, something already argued by Lynn Roller (1999, 345), one might be eager to see the distribution of her cult in Pisidia, as part of the incorporation of the region into the kingdom.

Yet, a cult extending over such a large area could have had significant regional variations (Roller 1999, 104, 258). Just like the Phrygians used many symbols for their Mother Goddess that they had inherited from earlier Anatolian peoples, the Pisidians undoubtedly incorporated the new prominent deity into an already existing religious life.

Several elements suggest this. Firstly, the representation of the Mother worshipped in the region is not entirely identical to the Phrygian image. Although she is clad in a Phrygian costume, there are several elements which do not fall in line with the prototypical Matar. The Bayındır figurine, for instance, depicts the goddess holding two children, a girl by her side and a nude boy on her shoulder. The presence of the children is unattested in a Phrygian context, and even prompted some scholars to identify her as Leto (Işık 1999, 30f.; Le Roy 1993, 247), who was popular in Lycia to the south (Frei 1990, 1812f.; Le Roy 1993, 244-247). Although the Phrygians were the first to address the goddess directly as "Mother", she is rarely associated with childbirth. Her position of power over the natural environment, rather than any specifically maternal function, was the chief factor giving her that status (Roller 1999, 6). The emphasis on fecundity as highlighted on the Bağsaray altar where the goddess is addressed as an agricultural deity (Bean 1954, 478-481; Robert 1980, 238f.) also forms a contrast with the Phrygian Matar, for whom fertility was rarely an issue and whose association with the wild and unstructured mountain landscape was directly at odds with agriculture and the settled countryside (Roller 1999, 114, 280). Both fertility elements are, however, present in the cult of the Mother Goddess worshipped in the region of Pisidia since the Neolithic Period (Talloen / Vanhaverbeke / Waelkens 2004, 434f.).

On the other hand, the most prominent aspect of the Phrygian Mother Goddess, namely her association with mountains, hollows and wild spaces, is something that was not present before in the Pisidian cult and can be ascribed to Phrygian influence. In this way, the Phrygian cult could have been grafted onto the existing worship of a mother goddess already venerated since the Neolithic Period. As a goddess whose status was indicated through the symbolism of powerful animals like lions, the Phrygian Mother probably found ready acceptance in Pisidia.

3. „She was not alone": other Iron Age cults in Pisidia

Apart from these elements of syncretism, the cult also did not have the same apparent monopoly as in Phrygia. Within Phrygia proper, the goddess clearly was the most important deity and received the most important cult (Roller 1999, 64, 109). Although she can hardly have been the only one (see Berndt-Ersöz 2004), Matar is the only deity clearly attested so far in Iron Age sources, underlining her absolute prominence in Phrygian cult (Roller 1999, 109).

For Pisidia, on the other hand, evidence does suggest that several other cults were practised at that time. We have already argued on a previous occasion that the historical Zeus worshipped in many cities of the region can in fact be traced back to the Luwian Tarhunt, a situation which, judging by the continuation of his theophoric nomenclature into the Graeco-Roman period, must have persisted in the Iron Age (Talloen / Vanhaverbeke / Waelkens 2004, 435f.). Tarhunt is generally thought to have remained the leading god of the lands inhabited by the descendants of the Luwians (Popko 1995, 167).

Another Luwian deity whose continuing cult can be assumed on the basis of nomenclature is the moon-god Arma.

More typical for the region of Pisidia were the warlike deities who appeared on the scene at this time. The *Solymoi*, the dwellers of the region around Termessos who are often equated with the inhabitants of the Milyas, were already mentioned as a people in the Ilias (Homer, Ilias VI, 155-210) which is generally considered to originate in the 8th century BCE. The cult of the founding hero and war god Solymos, who was considered the Termessian mythological ancestor, may therefore date back to this age (Bracke 1993, 16). Moreover, the *Solymoi* are known from the Ilias to have been assisted in their struggle against Bellerophon by the war god Ares, or at least his local counterpart as it is doubtful that the Greek god would already have been worshipped there at this time (Homer, Ilias VI, 203f.). Furthermore, Herodotos mentions an oracle of Ares among the *Milyadeis* in the early 5th century (Herodotos, Historiae VII, 76) which, together with the indigenous nature of the warrior, explicit in his epithets and depictions on horseback (Talloen / Vanhaverbeke / Waelkens 2004, 436f.), seems to confirm this Pisidian predilection of warlike deities.

We can therefore state that the Phrygian Mother was an addition to an existing pantheon, where deities with a maternal character already played and continued to play an important role. Yet, at no time did she take the dominating role she apparently fulfilled in the Phrygian motherland.

4. Other material evidence

The picture of religious assimilation, syncretism and "pluralism", as opposed to one of outright Phrygian dominance, is paralleled by the diversity witnessed in the contemporary material sources from the region.

Already the Bayındır tomb contents are not as homogeneous as often portrayed, yet represent collections of pieces from different origins. While the tombs and many of its contents display strong Phrygian similarities, the ivories of the goddess and the priest reveal west Anatolian artistic characteristics. As the style of the pieces has close affinities with the ivory figurines from the Artemision of Ephesos, especially the so-called Megabyzos figure, they were most probably made in neighbouring Lydia, rather than Phrygia (Özgen / Öztürk 1996, 26f.).

Ceramics, on the other hand, are a frequently used category of evidence to test or attest patterns of cultural affiliation, relationships or dominance. Our study region formed part of the crude regional classification of Iron Age wares in southern Turkey as proposed by James Mellaart (1954, 180) during the 1950s. For the Pisidian Lake district, the presence of a grey ware comparable to Phrygian grey wares was considered characteristic, as well as a southwestern group of painted wares, comprising Southwest Anatolian black on red, Central Anatolian wares, red on buff, black on buff and black on purplish grey wares, all with geometric patterns (Mellaart 1955, 118).

In recent years, part of the Pisidian Lake District was revisited by the Sagalassos Project in order to understand the origin and growth of the ancient town of Sagalassos and its associated territory in better terms. As a result, a better understanding of the contemporaneous distribution pattern of pottery fabrics throughout its later territory was established. Firstly, no grey wares, mentioned by J. Mellaart, and recently termed as Luwian ware (Bahar et al. 1996, 65ff.), were recorded in our study area so far, nor were any other typically Phrygian wares such as the painted wares. Southwest Anatolian wares were registered in the studied region,[2] be it mainly on the site of Düver (***fig. 5***). As far as tablewares are concerned, however, these are mostly represented by matt painted fabric groups, being cruder, semi-fine versions of the Southwest Anatolian wares, which were most probably locally or regionally produced. The common and kitchen wares were also considered local or regional in nature, in gritty fabrics.[3]

From this overview, it should be clear that our study region does not form part of any of the better documented ceramic / cultural provinces of Phrygia, Lydia, the southwest or the south coast of Anatolia. Before we try to explain the specific nature of the Pisidian material assemblage, we need to approach the people behind the pots.

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[2] See also Birmingham 1964 and Aydal et al. 1997 with further references.

[3] The collected pottery is currently being analysed by Patrick Degryse of the *Centre for Bio- and Geoarchaeology and Archaeological Image Processing* (www.archscience.be) and by the *Anatolian Iron Age Ceramics Project* of Peter Grave and Lisa Kealhofer (http://aia.une.edu.au).

5. The contemporaneous settlement pattern

The distribution of the mentioned fabrics can help to reconstruct a preliminary understanding of how the settlements in the region were actually organized, and also their wider cultural context (Vanhaverbeke / Waelkens 2003, 195-207).

The widest variety of fabrics was present at the most developed sites, such as Düver (Waelkens et al. 2000, 176-187) and Seydiköy (Vanhaverbeke / Waelkens 2003, 196, 246, 304). Southwest Anatolian wares in combination with the matt painted fabric variations, representing the high end of the tableware market, were recovered from these two sites. Mainly the fact that both settlements contained the largest mix of the available fabrics, and the widest variety of diagnostic forms, we do not consider to be coincidental from a material point of view. Düver being larger and more articulate compared to Seydiköy, both sites share a central position in their surrounding valley system. Therefore we tentatively regard them as "principalities" in their specific micro-regions, admittedly more from a descriptive / classificatory point of view, than as conceptual models of such sites, with explanatory value.

The ongoing fabric analyses could indicate in which ways other sites were affiliated with these "principalities". It is interesting to note that the ceramic spectrum found at both poles of attraction is comparable in variety, holds specific characteristics and, so far, seems to reach out to the hinterlands in typical ways, but that none of the two is in any way dominating over the other.

In 2005, the survey team of Hannelore Vanhaverbeke discovered an extensive (pre-)urban settlement on the Tepe Düzen plateau, located immediately to the southwest of Sagalassos. The architectural features, including a circuit wall, are still under study, as well as the pottery recovered from the surface of the plateau. At first sight, most fabrics seem to be fairly coarse in nature and datable to the Early Iron Age and (early) Hellenistic period. The nature of the fabrics, however, is certainly a function of the considerable weathering conditions on the plateau, for instance removing slipped or painted surfaces. Without going into too much detail of the ongoing archaeometrical analysis programme, it has become clear that the variety within the fabrics and the functional categories is comparable to the ceramic assemblages found at Düver and Seydiköy, including Southwest Anatolian and matt painted wares.

What is important in this context is the fact that both the ceramic spectrum and the nature of the mentioned sites suggest a stratification of the contemporaneous society, possibly with local "dynasties" constituting the framework of society, and an associated agricultural population.

6. Conclusion

This social structure holds the potential for peer polity interaction, explaining internal and external contacts between more or less centralized societies, displaying a growing degree of social ranking and economic specialization.

Such processes of social interaction did not result from models of cultural diffusion or domination, but may have taken many forms, such as competition, warfare, ceremonial exchange, language and symbolic exchange, basically involving units aspiring to be of equal status (Renfrew / Cherry 1986). Peer polity interaction cannot be regarded as a single moment in time, being rather a continuing and localised process of dialectic exchange, resulting in processes of emulation between different regions and communities and between the different social classes. As a result, material objects can be seen as part of communication strategies, demonstrating the position of these communities, regions or classes (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987; Schiffer 1999).

In this specific context, where most of the elementary data are still under study and are limited in their explanatory framework in that they result from reconnaissance survey observations (Vanhaverbeke / Waelkens 2003, 7-14), peer polity interaction is introduced as a preliminary working hypothesis, whereby differences are postulated between the elites, manifesting themselves with a more eclectic assemblage of material culture, and the rest of society, mainly attested from their pottery of a regionally specific nature, holding little potential for further social differentiation. A further example is provided by the funerary context, where elites seem to follow fashionable practices with rock-cut tombs and *tumuli*, whereas the rest of the population was still buried in *pithoi* tombs as before (see Mellink 1976, 21).

What we mainly need to understand from this perspective of material culture, and also having important implications for the way we perceive the contemporaneous religious life of the region, is that models of peer polity interaction do no longer allow to suggest the working of platforms of cultural, let alone political dominance. Such models are too simplistic, based on directional thinking involving material culture. When two objects look alike, processual archaeological thinking forces us to define which one imitates the other. The artefacts linked to a better known cultural complex or political sphere, such as Phrygia in our case, will automatically be considered to be prototypical and leading in cultural terms. Such models are now regarded too poor in material culture studies, with patterns of dialectical exchange preferred (Johnson 2004).

Phrygian culture or Early Iron Age culture in Anatolia is actually a prime example of hybrid messages, with many regional patterns of influence, affiliation or transition. Elites will typically promote themselves in such contexts by using an eclectic, and at the same time syncretic language of material manifestation. In such a way, so-called Phrygian, Lydian or other cultural elements are attributed new meaning by re-combining these aspects in a regional cultural substrate. This implies that material culture becomes meaningful in a model of cultural negotiation, in which every community or class expresses itself according to the means at their disposal. Even if the local elites would have imported Phrygian cultural objects on a sustainable basis, the model of cultural negotiation does not imply them to be vassals of the kingdom as a

result. Our recent survey evidence clearly indicates, however, they were not importing such objects in this way.

Although probably not a sustainable one, the aforementioned material categories testify to the existence of a certain pattern of exchange between Phrygia and Pisidia in the Early Iron Age. It is beyond doubt that together with these goods also ideas travelled. The presence of the cult of Matar in Pisidia therefore forms part of the matrix of exchange that existed between the two regions. The tomb content of *Tumulus* D at Bayındır suggests that members of the elite were very much involved in the organization of cult. As such, the group also seems to have adopted some elements of Matar's current Phrygian representation and worship, as part of the wider exchange pattern. Yet, while the elites emulated contemporary fashions in their negotiation with other competitive or comparable polities, they will also have clung strongly to their traditional cultural and religious patrimony which they shared with the other societal groups. This was essential in keeping open a communication channel with the lower classes, who were clearly not involved in the creation of the eclectic material language, but at the same time formed part of the cultural negotiation by representing the audience. This dual attitude resulted in a syncretistic cult, combining the local Mother Goddess of fertility and the Phrygian Mountain Mother, whose position of power over the natural environment made her acceptable for the local population. Although innovative, the cult did not forgo on tradition, nor did it entail any hierarchic changes in the pantheon.

The Iron Age as a whole was a period of intricate cultural interaction, involving both indigenous and intrusive traditions and influences. We hope to have demonstrated here that the mixed messages of the Pisidian Iron Age culture, exemplified in the figure of the Mother Goddess, should warn us against simplifications which identify other cultures with the dominant one.

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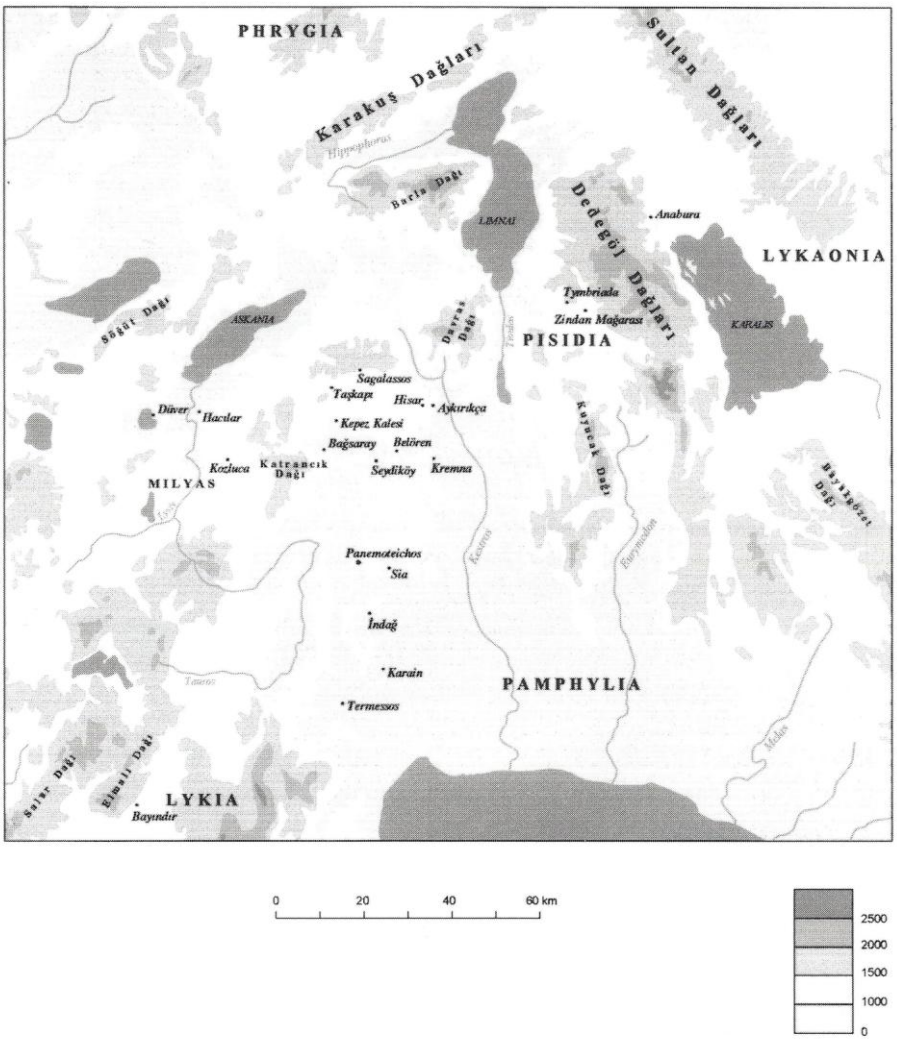

Fig. 1: Map of Pisidia
(E. Mahy / P. Talloen)

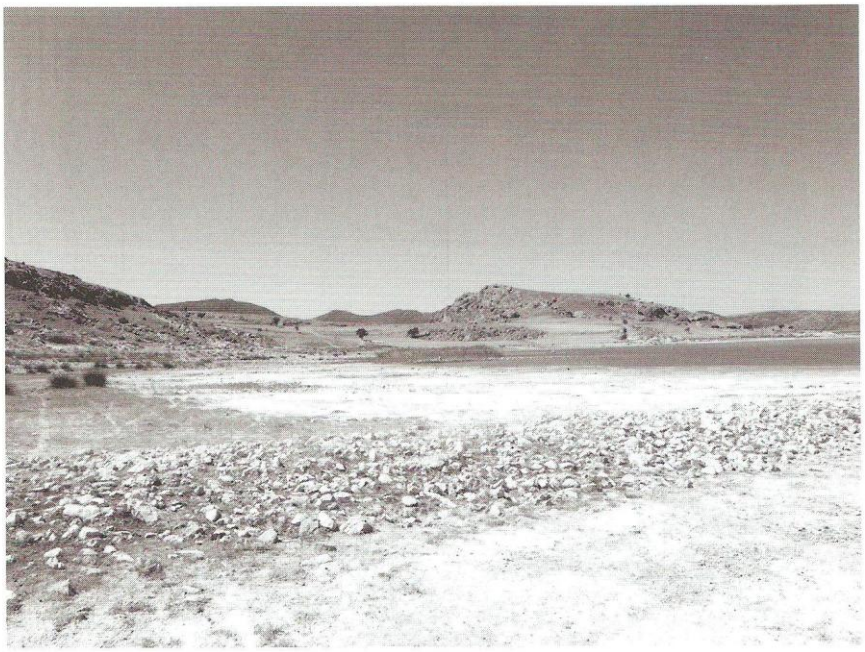

Fig. 2: View of the Early Iron Age site of Düver
(Sagalassos-Project)

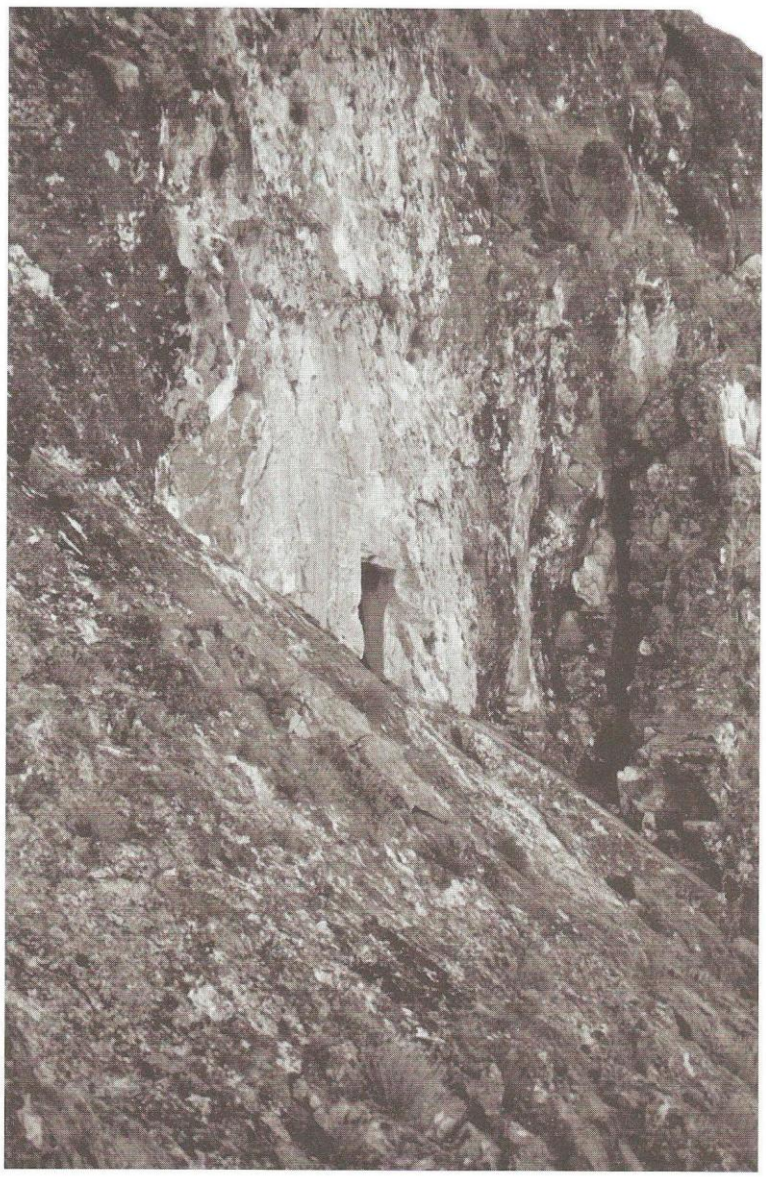

Fig. 3: The rock-cut tomb at the Early Iron Age site of Düver (Sagalassos-Project)

Fig. 4: The ivory statuette of Matar from Bayındır
(Özgen / Özgen 1992, 39 Fig. 42)

Fig. 5: Southwest Anatolian wares and derivates from the Early Iron Age site of Düver (Sagalassos-Project)